



# Focus on **Four-Year Leadership Plan**

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## **Getting results!**

Since the Department of Ecology was created in 1970, Ecology has spearheaded many improvements for Washington's land, air, and water. Air quality is significantly better, toxic industrial discharges have been cut, we generate about half of the hazardous waste that we did 20 years ago, landfills have been modernized, recycling has been widely embraced, large oil spills are much rarer, and thousands of contaminated sites have been cleaned up.

Nevertheless, the environment is still under tremendous pressure – from urban sprawl, from the growing demand on water supplies, and from toxic substances used in industrial processes and many consumer products. These pressures also threaten economy stability and the public's quality of life.

Director Jay Manning, appointed in February 2005, has challenged the department to bring new energy and creativity to the mission of protecting the environment. At the end of four years, he wants to look back and see measurable progress in several strategic areas. With that in mind, he has selected three major initiatives where focused, strategic, re-energized leadership by Ecology can make real progress on protecting human health and the environment and improving our quality of life.

Ecology already is doing important work in all three of these areas – so in that sense, they are not “new.” Unfortunately, progress in these areas has been elusive, and the agency's focus will be on determining how to overcome the obstacles that have hindered progress and on identifying new and creative ways to achieve greater success. The department will devote high-level attention to these issues and will invite collaboration, partnerships, innovative ideas and creative problem-solving in working with interested parties and citizens to achieve these ambitious goals.

## **Four-Year Leadership Plan**

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The following initiatives present significant challenges and risks. But they also offer tremendous opportunity to do something important and tangible for the environment.

### **I. Environmental Mitigation – a Better Way**

- More efficient for the applicant and Ecology
- More protective of the environment

Several studies have shown that the current approach to environmental mitigation (replacing or restoring resources) doesn't work very well – for permit applicants or for the environment. The current system, with its case-by-case, piecemeal development of mitigation projects, lacks regulatory consistency and predictability and is frustrating to project proponents. Even worse, the current system fails to adequately offset the environmental effects of big and small projects alike. Under this initiative, Ecology will build upon various approaches (e.g., Dept.

of Fish & Wildlife's "mitigation optimization," the Transportation Permit Efficiency & Accountability Committee's pilot projects, and Ecology's wetland banking) to develop an environmental mitigation system that is more efficient and predictable for project proponents and for the agency – one that effectively and permanently restores and preserves high-value environmental resources within a watershed. (*Ecology lead: Josh Baldi, 360-407-6829*)

## **II. Reducing Toxic Threats**

Businesses have greatly reduced the amount of toxic chemicals they generate and dispose of in Washington, but toxic substances are still rapidly accumulating in our homes, offices and the natural environment. While our knowledge of the effects of toxics is always evolving, we know enough to be concerned and we have a responsibility to take action. We need to re-examine our existing efforts to reduce toxins that threaten public and environmental health and work with businesses, consumers and others to achieve greater success. A key goal will be to take steps to reduce the use of toxic substances on the front end, so exposure risks and long-term cleanup costs are avoided. (*Ecology lead: Greg Sorlie, 360-407-0291*)

## **III. Flexible, Successful Watershed Management**

The third priority agenda item will be a multi-faceted water resource program. This will include improving how we manage the Columbia River, facilitating high-quality, multi-purpose storage projects, adopting stream-flow regulations and quantifying water rights. The centerpiece of our water agenda will be several pilot projects that will experiment with increased flexibility in water use to foster more efficient water use, while restoring and maintaining healthy stream flows. (*Ecology lead: Joe Stohr, 360-407-7015*)

## **Next steps**

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More-complete descriptions and timelines will be developed for each of the three initiatives during summer 2005. Ecology will work closely with other state agencies, local governments, tribes, businesses, farmers, the environmental community and others to develop and refine the work plans. The initiatives will be top priorities at Ecology, and the director will invest considerable time and effort to move them forward.

At the same time, Ecology's 10 environmental programs will continue to vigorously implement their agendas, whether it is cleaning up contaminated sites, managing solid or hazardous wastes, improving air and water quality, preventing or responding to oil spills, or protecting our state's shorelines. The department also will continue to make progress on streamlining permits, improving regulatory processes and being more innovative in delivering services.

*"Protecting human health, the environment and Washington's quality of life is what we are here to do. Through our Four-Year Leadership Plan, I hope we will find ways to do it better." -- Director Jay Manning*